



# Department of Justice

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## **THREE COLOMBIAN NATIONALS ARRESTED AND CHARGED WITH MONEY LAUNDERING AND NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Three Colombian nationals – Ricardo Mauricio Bernal Palacios, 39, Juan Manual Bernal Palacios, 44, and Camilo Andres Ortiz Echeverri, 36 – were named in a 49-count indictment returned by a grand jury and unsealed today in the Southern District of Florida, and were arrested on March 2 by law enforcement authorities in Bogota, Colombia, pursuant to arrest warrants issued in the judicial district charging them with violations of federal narcotics and money laundering laws, the Justice Department announced today.

The indictment alleges that from 2002 to the present, the defendants laundered drug proceeds through the United States for the purpose of promoting the cocaine distribution rings operating internationally in Colombia, Mexico and Europe. The indictment identifies more than \$3 million of drug proceeds which were laundered through U.S. banks. The indictment also alleges that the defendants entered the cocaine trade directly, conspiring from 2004 to the present to distribute more than five kilograms of cocaine.

“The success of this investigation and the resulting prosecution is a prime example of the heightened level of cooperation among international law enforcement partners, all committed to dismantling international drug organizations wherever they may operate,” said U.S. Attorney R. Alexander Acosta. “The drug trade has become a losing proposition for traffickers: they will not only get caught and extradited to face American justice, but they will also be stripped of their drug proceeds.”

“Drug traffickers who profit from the laundering of millions of dollars in drug proceeds can no longer feel safe beyond the borders of the United States. The DEA will continue to aggressively follow the money and pursue all the members of these drug trafficking organizations both domestically and internationally,” said DEA Special Agent in Charge Mark R. Trouville of the Miami office.

The indictment also alleges that the defendants operated their narcotics business from Mexico City and Bogota. To date, the combined efforts of these law enforcement agencies has resulted in the seizure of approximately 2,000 kilograms of cocaine, approximately 12 million Eurodollars, and the closure of an exchange house in Mexico.

If convicted on all counts, the defendants could face a maximum of life in prison on the narcotics charges, and up to 20 years in prison on the money laundering counts. A formal extradition request has not yet been filed.

An indictment is not evidence of guilt. The defendants named in this indictment are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

This case is the result of the combined efforts of U.S. law enforcement and Colombian, Mexican and Spanish authorities. It was investigated by the Drug Enforcement Administration. It is being prosecuted by Senior Trial Attorney Mia Levine of the Asset Forfeiture and Money Laundering Section of the Criminal Division, along with Assistant U.S. Attorney Anthony Lacosta of the Southern District of Florida.

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